

Matthew 3:1-12

We continue in our study of Matthew 1-4 this morning which we are calling Beginning. We just finished looking at the nativity, which was one type of beginning. Now we are moving to another type of beginning. The beginning of Jesus' ministry as John the Baptist prepares the way.

READ/PRAY

I want us to look at this man, John the Baptist, hear his message, and heed his warning this morning as we learn from these verses.

I. The Man

1. He was unacceptable to the religious v1, 4

- a. There was nothing elaborate or attractive about him.
- b. He wasn't your typical megachurch pastor.

2. He was predicted by the prophet v3

- a. Matthew quotes from Isaiah 40:3.
- b. Isaiah 40:3 *A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.*
- c. The imagery here in ancient times is of a herald who would come before a king, announcing the king's coming and making sure the road on which the king would travel was smooth and ready.

3. He was popular with the common man v5-6

- a. All of Jerusalem and Judea were coming out to be baptized by him.
- b. Baptism was not common in OT history leading up to the time of John the Baptist.
- c. In fact, the only people who were baptized were Gentiles who decided to become followers of God...so what are these Jews doing?
 1. Baptism was saying, I am not an insider just because I was born Jewish
 2. I am renouncing my former ways, and embracing faith in the one true God.
- e. These Jews from Jerusalem and Judea were admitting that their Jewishness and their religiosity did not guarantee them a right standing before God.
- f. They realized that they needed to personally confess their sins and profess faith in God...and that is what we see them doing...lots of them.

4. He was bold and unapologetic v7

5. He was humble v11

II. His Message v2

1. Repentance is a change of mind, heart, and action...he is calling for a drastic change so that they can get ready for the coming of the Kingdom of heaven.
2. This is the first of 32 times in the book of Matthew that we will see this phrase "kingdom of heaven."

III. His Warning v8-12

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance for judgment and the judge is coming.

1. Just because they were born into the “right family” didn’t mean anything.
2. They must repent, and be sure that they bear fruit in keeping with repentance.
3. Just because they were good, religious Jews keeping the law and making sacrifice didn’t mean anything.
4. They must repent, and be sure that they bear fruit in keeping with repentance.
5. John the Baptist makes it clear that true repentance will be accompanied by fruit!

Jesus makes this clear too.

Luke 13:6-9 *And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ 8 And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”*

1. A fig tree is planted in a vineyard. Notice.
 - a. This is not a fig tree farm.
 - b. It is a vineyard...vines...not trees.
 - c. This was intentional.
2. A vineyard has vine dressers that work in the vineyard to produce optimum fruit and the fig tree benefited from this care. It had the greatest care.
3. In spite of the intentionality of the vineyard owner...in spite of the care...it bore no fruit. Cut it down!
 - a. Because it is unproductive!
 - b. Because it is counter-productive. It is taking up valuable space!

Vinedresser steps in...wait! Give me one more year. If it doesn’t bear next year, then cut it down!

1. THE END. There is no answer given.
2. There is no ending. It leaves us hanging.

Immediate interpretation is for the people of Israel.

1. John the Baptist comes warning them that the vinedresser is coming...the one who is mightier than he and his winnowing fork was in his hand.
2. Look at the context of the parable.
 - a. Luke 13:1-5 *Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? 3 I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*
 - b. What did they do to deserve this Jesus?
 - c. You are missing the point! It isn’t they deserve it and you don’t?
 - d. No! But unless you repent you will all likewise perish...just at different times in different ways.
5. Then he goes into verse 6: The fruit is repentance...just what John the Baptist was calling for.

Let's apply this to the church, because the church is who has really had special care.

1. The life, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ to redeem us.
2. THE GOSPEL

We will be known by our fruits.

1. There is the fruit of righteousness
2. There is the fruit of spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self control.
3. There is the fruit of our lips...praise.
4. Here...the primary fruit he is looking for is the fruit of repentance.
 - a. Matthew 3:8
 - b. Martin Luther's first thesis: When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

We shouldn't take any of this for granted, assuming that we wouldn't be held to the same expectation as the Jews.

Romans 11:17-21 *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.*

1. We need to be careful
2. We don't need to take his grace for granted.
3. If the Jews were expected to prove their repentance with fruit, We must bear fruit in keeping with repentance as well.

Acts 26:16-20

1. What if Jesus walked among us today...as a church? What would He find? Fruit?
2. What if he walked among your section of pews? He pulls back the facade. What does he see?
3. What if he walked to you and looked you over?
4. What does God say about us? What does He say about you?

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about God in this sermon and in the biblical texts used? About Christ? About the Holy Spirit?
2. What did you learn about yourself in this sermon and in the texts used?
3. Were there any clear promises or commands in the biblical texts used?
4. What is the hardest truth that stands out to you from this message or the verses referenced?
5. What is the most impactful point or statement from the sermon?
6. How can you respond to this message?